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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-06 H-02 INR-06 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14 USIA-12 IO-11 UPW-01

AID-20 RSR-01 /106 W

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R 051041Z OCT 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 760
INFO BANGKOK 5482
CINCPAC
DANANG 5589
USDEL FRANCE
PHNOM PENH 1952
VIENTIANE 9263

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 15933

CINCPAC FOR POLAD.

SUBJECT: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS

1. ACCORDING TO CURRENT PROVISIONAL FIGURES VOTER TURNOUT WAS 87.7 PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS AND 91.5 PERCENT OF THE VOTES WERE VALID WITH THE RESULT THAT THIEU CAN CLAIM 78.7 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE VOTED THEIR CONFIDENCE IN HIM.

2. THE VOTE DEMONSTTATED THAT THE GVN EXERTS THOROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL OVER THE POPULATION OF THE COUNTRY, AND CAN EFFECTIVELY EXECUTE MAJOR TASKS THAT IT CONSIDERS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE. ALTHOUGH LARGELY UNENTHUSIASTIC AND SKEPTICAL OVER AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION, PEOPLE TROOPED TO THE POLLS IN RECORD NUMBERS MOVED PROBABLY BY A COMBINATION OF CIVIC DUTY, FEAR OF HARASSMENT BY THE AUTHORITIES AND THE ABSENCE OF WIDESPREAD DISSENSION. THE ELECTION WAS THUS AN IMPRESSIVE EXHIBITION OF CIVIC OBEDIENCE.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MD
REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 1/26/82
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
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3. NEVERTHELESS, JUDGING FROM LOCAL RETURNS, MANY PEOPLE IN THE MORE PROSPEROUS AND SECURE PROVINCES PROBABLY VOTED OUT OF POSITIVE SUPPORT FOR THIEU. MOREOVER, WHERE OPPOSITION WAS SUFFICIENTLY INTENSE AND ORGANIZED, AS IN MR I, PEOPLE WERE ABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR DISSATISFACTION BY STAYING AWAY FROM THE POLLS OR CASTING INVALID VOTES.

4. WE DOUBT THAT VIETNAMESE WILL POINT WITH PRIDE TO OCTOBER 3. (EVEN A PRESIDENTIAL AIDE APPEARED SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED BY THE OVERWHELMING PERCENTAGES.) MOST WILL BE GLAD IT IS OVER AND RELIEVED TO TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO OTHER SUBJECTS.

5. FROM EMBASSY AND PRIVATE AMERICAN OBSERVERS WHO VISITED POLLING STATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE AND IN SAIGON WE GATHER THE GENERAL IMPRESSION THAT THE CONDUCT OF THE ELECTION WAS AS A RULE MECHANICALLY CORRECT. THE PROCEDURES WERE ORDERLY AND THE SECRECY OF THE VOTE WAS GENERALLY MAINTAINED. EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONABLE OR INCORRECT PRACTICES THAT WERE NOTICED AT CERTAIN POLLING STATIONS INCLUDE FLIMSY CURTAINS OR TRANSPARENT BALLOT ENVELOPES HINDERING A GENUINELY SECRET BALLOT, ABSENCE OF WASTE PAPER BASKETS FOR DISCARDED BALLOTS, BALLOTS ALREADY PLACED IN ENVELOPES BY POLLING STATION PERSONNEL, AND PRESENCE OF POLICE WITHIN THE STATION.

6. THE EFFECT OF ENEMY EFFORTS TO DISGUPT THE ELECTION WAS MINORCA CERTAINLY FARNESS THAN HIS AVERRED INTENTIONS. SIMILARLY, THE CALL BY THE NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION FOR A BOYCOTT HAD LIMITED CONSEQUENCES. RECOURSE TO VIOLENT CONFRONTATION IN DANANG, HOWEVER, PROBABLY DID AFFECT THE VOTE THERE. ALTHOUGH CONTINUING TO CONDEMN THE ELECTION, THE COMMUNISTS UHD THE NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION CAN DGAW LITTLE ADVANTAGE OG ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE RESULTS.

7. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE TENOR OF THE PRESIDENCY'S NEWS GELEASE ON OCTOBER 4 SUGGESTS PRESIDENT THIEU INTERPRETS SUNDAY'S VOTE AS A VINDICATION OF HIS DECISION TO PUSH AHEAD WITH THE ELECTION AS WELL AS EVIDENCE FOR THE RECORD

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OF POPULAR ENDORSEMENT OF HIS LEADERSHIP. ANY CONTINGENCY PLANS HE MAY HAVE HAD FOR STEPPING DOWN AND HOLDING NEW ELECTIONS WILL NOT DOUBT BE DISCARDED. WHATEVER FURTHER EFFORTS HIS OPPONENTS MAY MAKE IN THE COMING DAYS TO DISCREDIT THE ELECTIONS, THE OCTOBER 3 EXERCISE UNDOUBTEDLY STRENGTHENED THIEU'S DETERMINATION TO REMAIN IN POWER.

8. WE HAVE HEARD THAT THIEU IS NOW CONSIDERING AN AMNESTY (POSSIBLY TO INCLUDE SOME PROMINENT POLITICAL PERSONALITIES), A CABINET SHAKE-UP, FURTHER ECONOMIC REFORMS, AND ESPECIALLY A CHANGE OF "STYLE" IN HIS GOVERNMENT. THESE REPORTS MAY INDICATE THAT HE DOES NOT REGARD SUNDAY'S RESULTS AS A MANDATE FOR UNHEEDING AUTHORITARIAN RULE BUT AS ENCOURAGEMENT TO GET ON TOWARD HIS ANNOUNCED GOALS OF PEACE AND PROGRESS.
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